

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - A  
Wisdom 12:13, 16-19;  
Romans 8:26-27;  
Matthew 13:24-43  
Little Flower - 7/23/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

As you may remember, Pope Francis declared December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, to November 20, 2016, the Solemnity of Christ the King, an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. Many of the themes of the Jubilee are embodied in today's reading from the Book of Wisdom.

According to the book of Wisdom, although God's might is the source of justice, his mastery over all things makes him lenient to all. The master of might, he judges with clemency and governs us with leniency. Two alternate opening prayers in the former Sacramentary capture today's reading in simple language: "Lord our God, in you justice and mercy meet," and "in your unbounded mercy you have revealed the beauty of your power through your constant forgiveness of our sins." The reading also suggests that God's mercy and forgiveness are the basis for our hope.

Having addressed God's power, justice, and mercy, the author of Wisdom reminds us that God's actions teach us that if we are just, we also have to be kind. If justice and mercy meet in God and if God's power is revealed in forgiveness, justice and mercy must meet in us, and we are strongest when we forgive others. For the most part, our idea of justice is punishment and retribution, not mercy and forgiveness. For us, forgiveness is often a sign of weakness rather than a sign of strength.

A constant theme in both the Old and New Testaments is that we have to make our own and live the attitudes and values of God and Jesus. This teaching about mercy and forgiveness is embodied in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, Jesus said, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy*" [Mt. 5:7]. A few verses later, Jesus insists that when there is alienation, no matter who is at fault, we have to take the initiative in reconciliation.

Today's Gospel contains three parables of the Kingdom. The Gospel calls the first parable the parable of the weeds. A man sowed good seed, but an enemy sowed weeds throughout the wheat. The man told his servants to leave the weeds until the harvest lest they destroy the wheat as well. Today we are surrounded by temptations or at least by conflicting values.

Young people growing up today have it so much more difficult than we had it: alcohol, drugs of all kinds, sex, and pornography are more accessible than they have ever been. Our society, through the media, has made money and possessions, power and prestige, and pleasure even bigger idols than before. Social media is destroying civility within our society, and Internet bullying is a major problem. However, I would argue that the biggest problem of all is that there is no consensus of values in our society. No one agrees on what is good or beautiful or true. A mother of three boys, two college students and one high school senior, recently suggested to me that college students often spend the first two years of college learning how to navigate life in this climate.

The two other parables focus on the kingdom itself. Notwithstanding the weeds or temptations or conflicting values in our world, the parable of the tiny mustard seed that grew into the largest bush suggests that the kingdom of Christ will spread on the earth until the coming of God's kingdom in its fulness. The parable of the yeast suggests that the seed of God's kingdom brought by Christ and planted in the hearts of believers will transform the world.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, most of us struggle with prayer, especially when we struggle with temptation. We often find it difficult to pray. We often do not know how to put our prayers into words. In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us not to worry. When we find it difficult to pray or do not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit who lives within us prays with and for us.